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WHAT DO PEOPLE DO AT WORK WHEN THEY'RE NOT WORKING?

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Abstract

What do people do at work when they're not working?

The effects of interruptions at work were investigated, first through the work experience of a group of 20 white collar employees and as complementary information an overview of the interruptions literature was taken. Specifically this study falls on the reasons leading to employees solicited interruptions at work and which non-related work activities they engage in. The importance of these practises to the organization is the key variable of study of this project. Mainly, workers interrupt work in order to unwind, to establish relationships with colleagues, to take care of personal life and to gain stimulus to work. This study demonstrates the importance of practises performed by the employees and the positive impact they have in the organization.

Keywords:

Breaks

Interruptions

Non-work related practises

Productivity

Project's Purpose: General Overview

The allocation of time at work by employees is each time more generative of ambiguous perspectives. On the one hand it is suggested by many organizations there is an incurrence of significant costs through interrupted work moments by employees. For instance, surfing on HP website a leading multinational of IT products, we can see seven pieces of advice to fight against interruptions at work: “Interruptions are the enemy of productivity and can cause unnecessary stress. Try our helpful techniques to help reduce interruptions and keep you focused on what’s important: your work” (Source: HP.com). On the other hand, Hamermesh, (1990, p.121-S) argued that “Time spent on the job relaxing can increase workers’ productivity by enabling them to rest when they are physically or mentally fatigued” adding positive reasons to perform breaks.

According to the survey annually realized by salary.com in 2008, 2.500 employees’ were asked to share their work experience, namely regarding their personal allocation of time at work. The survey found that¹ about 73% of the respondents admitted they spend some work time on activities that are non-work related and moreover 22% admitted to spend more than two hours per day. The remaining 27% suggested they don’t waste time at work, even though 33% of them indicated some activities that they engaged in are not work-related implicating that these individuals do not consider those activities as time wasters. Data provided by salary.com indicates that employees are influenced to see those activities as a waste of time, easily suggested by the title “The 2008 Wasting Time at Work Survey”, although time wasted at work is

¹Additionally it is shown in *exhibit 1*, some considered “time-wasting” activities that employees engage in and some work-related distracters (Source: Salary.com)

something that is going to be discussed, if it is really lost or if even in those periods of time that workers are not working have a work relevant importance behind them.

Jett and George, (2003, p. 498) stated that “The potential positive consequences of breaks include stimulation for the individual who is performing a job that is routine or boring, opportunities to engage in activities that are essential to emotional well-being, job satisfaction, and sustained productivity; and time for the subconscious to process complex problems that require creativity”. Reinforcing these positive aspects of interruptions through text editing tasks and very experienced participants, Zijlstra, Roe, Leonova, and Krediet, (1999) verified that interruptions have a positive effect on performance increasing the speed of task execution, while maintaining the level of quality. This is contrary to their initial hypothesis that interruption provided an overall deterioration of performance.

The following questions have been raised such as, why are some organizations trying to drastically reduce the interruptions at work? Which losses would employees incur in terms of work performance? Finally how those losses, would affect the organization? Thus, generating controversial viewpoints and assuming particularly significance under the organizational behavior in organizations break moments during office hours require further study. Evaluating non-work related practises performed at work is the main propose of this research project, intending to show some consequences of interruptions at work. Employee’s awareness and description of their typical work day will allow the analysis of what do people do at work when they are not working, getting a closer look of their actions, feelings and interpretations. Then, being encoded into types of non-work related practises, reasons to perform them and consequences of such activities.

Literature Review

Cycles, routines or events that are socially constructed by human action belong to a subjective notion of time (Orlikowski and Yates, 2002). This notion of time where people and particularly, the employees manage their time suggests a start point to study the importance of understanding why time is allocated in employee's interruptions and how this can influence their performance and organizational productivity. For instance surfing on the web for recreational purposes is such a routine that could damage the productivity and constitute heavy costs to the organization as argued by Lim, (2002). In contrast, Belanger and Slyke, (2000) show some benefits of spending time surfing on the web even for non-related work purposes, "The most powerful learning comes from direct experience". Through the application play, and applying technology or applications to tasks associated with personal enjoyment lead to individual learning influencing the better performance of the employee (Belanger and Slyke, 2000). However not all moments are the most appropriate for work being interrupted due to the variations of workload levels, when an employee is performing a single or a multiple task (Bailey, Iqbal, 2008). The most favourable moments to interrupt work are located on the boundaries between tasks when the concentration required is lower instead of interrupting at the peak of the workload (Iqbal, Adamczyk, Zheng, Baley, 2005).

Workers in sedentary jobs affirm facing high fatigue levels when they don't have the possibility to rest for some time during the work-day, being indicative that those practices allowing them to relax and to recover energies enhance psychological satisfaction and hence their productivity (Hamermesh, 1990). Describing this phenomenon of extensive exhaustion, fatigue and job disinterest, as burnout, Salmela-Aro and Nurmi, (2004) refer to individual motivation and concretization of related

personal goals as one mechanism that has been assumed a highlighted position to overcome the effects of burnout. Through the commitment of personal goals employees are more likely to reach favorable levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, enhancing their well-being and decreasing their possibilities of having stress related problems (Salmela-Aro and Nurmi, 2004). Demonstrating the influence and relations established between personal matters, leisure and work, D'Abate (2005) systematizes the kind of personal activities carried out by the employees in a typical work day. The need to execute those kinds of activities on the job is a function of the individual giving meaning and importance to each dimension of their life. Moreover the organization should recognize employee's needs as a mean of gaining employees gratitude and support regardless of the positions they hold (Honeycutt, 1989).

Jett and George, (2003) describe an in-depth perspective of interruptions at work, giving positive and negative consequences for the person being interrupted and distinguish them in four main types: spontaneous form of interrupting the work, 'breaks'; factors outside the employee's control that lead them to be interrupted involuntarily, 'intrusions'; breaking concentration on a primary task, 'distractions'; and inconsistencies between one's knowledge and expectations and one's immediate observation, 'discrepancies'. The present study will explore the planned form of employees interrupting the work, interruptions as 'breaks' looking for adding to the literature a framework of effects provided by the non-work related practises that employees engage in, provided by the research question: which benefits exist from employees engaging in non-work related practises?

Methodology

Data consisted of semi-structured interviews of a group of 20 white collar professionals spread over different management areas and organizations. The purpose was to analyse a standard of workers with a moderate degree of autonomy in order to get similarities in their behaviour and explore the differences. Qualitative data was required in this study for the detailed description of the phenomena, and allowing the adjustment of questions according to the employees' experience.

Discussion of Results

Non-work related practises performed at work were identified by the interviewees and the reasons and circumstances leading to the execution of these practises. Following is a description of the behaviours and reasons shaping some consequences of these practises.

Moments to Unwind Enabling Concentration

Taking time to unwind is the biggest explanation suggested by the employees to carry out the non-work related practices described in (*exhibit 2*). An important result of relaxing, concerns the increased concentration of employees to perform their work achieved through those moments that they can unwind for some moments during the work-day as an employee explained:

“Sincerely I think I don’t do anything to be more concentrated. I think that the relief of weight that I felt before allows me to concentrate better, in other words, I feel more suitable, physically and psychologically, concentrating more from that moment.”

Non-work related activities performed by employees in order to concentrate are behind, the reason of relaxing. There is not any specific interruption to differentiate each ones from the interviews data, meaning that taking a break to relax, to distract the worker's mind leads to maintain the levels of concentration to the work itself. Actually the employees increase their concentration at work when they have time to relax after a significant period of time spent in a task requiring high concentration patterns (Bigelow, 1974). Nobody is concentrated on the same object all the time meaning that during the execution of a given task the concentration level is constantly changing, slightly or wildly, depending on the variables affecting it (Nichols, 1963). Rita's strategy of leaving the desk to get some air is such a solution that gives her renewed concentration:

"(...) to keep me concentrated is the best. I leave the desk and go outside to get some air and then I return a little bit more refreshed because I spend a lot of time in front of the computer and this makes me tired, it tires my eyes, my head, (...)"

Surfing on the web is a common practise in order to unwind the mind allowing the maintenance of concentration at work. An Australian study examining 300 employees find out that taking time surfing the internet at the office for non-work reasons increases productivity. The results apply who moderately use the web, probably less than 20% of their total time in the office, however is relevant to understand the importance of employees engagement in this kind of interruption and the interrelation with concentration, "People need to zone out for a bit to get back their concentration" said Coker, author of the study. Popular activities included searching for information about products, reading online news sites, playing online games and watching videos on YouTube (Source: redOrbit Staff).

Another practice that joins together the concepts of relaxing and concentration at work is listening to music. This activity explicitly shows the two direct effects that it has on the employees, firstly because it promotes a certain degree of relaxation:

"I listen to music to decompress, it lightens the work environment. With or without music it is completely different with music it is much more relaxing..."

Secondly it allows the employees to extract themselves mainly from the noisy environment lived in an open space:

"Thus we are not hearing everything around us, all conversations, because as we work in an open space, when a lot of people are in the office sometimes, it is difficult to concentrate on our work and this is a way of tuning things out in your surroundings."

Speaking with colleagues or going to bathroom are also some strategies followed by participants being helpful in their attempt of refreshing, relaxing and resting, providing the maintenance of their attention:

"Often I have too much pressure, even when I have pressure, even though there is still work to do, I am there, five, ten minutes to talk a bit with my colleagues to relax myself, and to concentrate."

"I lose concentration and I take ten more minutes to concentrate, sometimes I go to the bathroom to define these goals, but I think it's beneficial because my brain is not focused on the same subject all the time."

Additional benefits could come up from certain practices such as: to drink coffee or reading the newspaper; some employees become more prepared and adapted to start working and at executing the work:

"I drink coffee and read the journal before starting work, to unwind a bit (...) When I arrive late and I know that I will have no time to do that ritual, the day seems worse because I get the idea that I did not have time in the morning to calmly look at some things and If I start my day in a rush the rest of the day is affected."

Other interviewee stated that during the time spent playing a game or smoking a cigarette some solutions for work problems can be found faster:

"Sometimes I'm blocked for 5, 10, 15 minutes and nothing, I think I cannot, and I decide to get up from the desk to go doing something and these kind of activities, playing table football, snooker, anything, help me to unwind to change the context. Sometimes I'm playing a game or smoking a cigarette and I find

the solution, a light turns on. Maybe if I was in front of computer devilling on that problem I would need twice as much time...”

Suggesting that, in those moments new thoughts are generated unconsciously by the workers’ mind, illustrating the importance of these practises for themselves regarding problem solving and concentration at work.

Establish Relationships with Colleagues enabling Positive Connections

Positive connections regards the social relationships associated with individuals interpersonal interactions, having positive effects on certain dimensions of human behavior (Cameron, Caza, 2005). Due to the fact that work is split by all employees, the need to work as a team is an explanation that invites the workers to form relationships at work. During their interruptions positive relations are built bringing benefits to the employee’s performance and even for their health². It is not intuitive that best friends working together could bring advantages to the work suggesting the employees focus on the relationship management than on task execution, even though these relationships affected usefully the employees enhancing and increasing the productivity (Dutton, 2003).

The list of practices shown in (*exhibit 2*) illustrates some benefits when the employees take breaks to strengthen their relationship with each other. As mentioned before another practice leads workers to interrupt work concerns speaking with colleagues. An interview indicates that it’s necessary to have more than a professional conversation to make people tell most work relevant things:

“...if I just have professional conversations with them and I would not give them some confidence, I could not get half of the information that I get. And it’s important those informal relations to obtain

²Note that positive relationships increase the anabolic hormones having a calming effect on body and mind (Seeman, 2001)

more information that's sometimes relevant, this information, mainly about unproductiveness of some people, that is only known after a coffee or through greeting colleagues every day."

Thus, suggesting the creation of informal relations to create a certain degree of confidence and trust with colleagues. Many participants referred to some practices such as simply greeting colleagues or even accompanying colleagues on their breaks, stimulates the development of informal conversations and affective relations, bringing positive results:

- Useful ideas could be suggested or doubts can be clarified that help them to work better: *"One time, I went to have coffee with my colleague before we went to see one of our clients. She told me that she had already met with them and she told me about the client and gave some pieces of advice. This helped me know how to deal with them..."*

- If an employee is overloaded with work some friendly colleagues could be disposed to do some additional work for him: *"...but the fact that we have a good relationship I think that helps, for instance if I am overloaded, usually we divide our tasks or ask some colleague, if it's possible for him, to do something and if he doesn't, he is the first person to be ready to help us, and I think that is important."*

- Eliminating the barriers of being afraid of interrupting the colleague when he is executing a task: *"...eliminating that barrier of not wanting to interrupt your colleague that is working, as you already have a closer relationship with him you do not have any problems to go to his office, being senior or junior staff and interrupt him and clarify your questions."*

- Other work experiences are shared by further colleagues giving them a stronger organizational background: *"I think that if these conversations would not exist I would feel lonelier, maybe I would not have the perception. I think I would not be aware of how things happen in other sites because the organization has some dimension, around 300 people."*

Conversations between employees can be had not only in person, but also through network programs such as internal organizational chatting programs, or Messenger. The use of the Messenger is in some cases restricted by the organization as reported by an

interviewee, even though she suggests some advantages in using these types of programs, decreasing the distance between the employees:

“But we have the communicator that is like Messenger and we can add all the bank workers and the people meet (...) a lot of times I ask myself about things, products, applications, that I don’t know, I ask a colleague through communicator and then I tell the client, he doesn’t even know that I didn’t know.”

In certain organizations is possible to find some leisure rooms containing social games such as, table football or snooker tables. Some employees that have those conditions argue to use them in order to spend time with colleagues and tighten their relationships with one another:

“...the company is addicted to table football, after lunch, we eat lunch relatively fast and then we do not want to start working immediately so we play some table football (...) to create a certain team building or team spirit I think is essential.”

This range of social-playable practices is very useful to reinforce and to influence the deepening of the relationships at work, also designed as team building.

Enhancing Intrinsic Motivation as Additional Stimulus to Work

“Individual motivation has typically been conceptualized in terms of self-articulated goals, which are important because they provide a basis for the ongoing regulation of behavior”, (Salmela-Aro and Nurmi, 2004, p. 472). Through the employee’s engagement in some non-work related practices at work, shown in (*exhibit 2*) they admitted to become more motivated. Acquiring motivation through the engagement of certain practices, employees suggested gaining a stronger willingness to work. The first coffee of the day is an example described by Isabel demonstrating the important of this practice before she starts working:

“...I think that would affect me, mainly the first coffee of the morning because this wakes me up, gives attention and the willingness to do things.”

Given some employees personal experience surfing on the web is a source of motivation at work. It was shared by one participant that she interrupted her work to check the online campaign, which shows the performance level between the company's agencies³ being a factor for taking time out of her schedule to check it, and giving her an incentive to be more committed to the work itself:

"It's good because it's a healthy competition between agencies. The fact that we are the newest agency and we are above the majority of the agencies still motivates more. Thus we are always there checking if we are above the others if we are not, what need to be done to have a higher score..."

Another way of using the internet providing individual motivation is reading online journals. Pedro reported reading journals about personal interests such as football teams as having a motivator effect:

"...just reading the journal "A Bola", if Benfica wins or reading something about Benfica, if it has some news about Mourinho, are things you like to read and entertain yourself and wakes you up a little bit and gives you motivation."

Speaking with colleagues could also be a source of motivation depending on the kind of conversations and procedures behind those conversations. Some interviews mentioned some colleagues' conversation contents were very enthusiastic for their personal motivation at work and showing that some social actions provide motivational effects:

- Speaking about the success, negative aspects or specific examples: *"If it is a conversation about people, about the success, about the economic conjuncture, about positive aspects, and negative aspects, about specific examples of success or failure maybe I'd get more motivated or more excited to do my work well, fast, and with efficiency."*

- Celebrating the success: *"Often those little breaks, beyond serving to relate jokes or to kid with each other or to comment news, daily life, whatever, serves many times, as well to toast for the*

³Note which this practice is not part of the work itself : *"(...) simply I go there to check what is going on, I don't go there to see something about work but I go there to see what our score is..."*

success (...) when it's good, it's great, because we have reasons to celebrate and this brings an increase of motivation..."

- **Announcement of good news:** *"I still remember it didn't happen long time, 2 months ago, on one of those breaks we managed to find out that the centre had bought a new brand, we were negotiating a long time ago and we bought a new brand. This was a reason to be proud and an increase of motivation"*

Another action leading to the creation of motivation for the worker could be the integration in small workers-societies such as was reported by one of the interviewees, through the management of the Euro-million society, (some employees joining together to share that non-work goal). An employee reported its usefulness as a source of collective motivation:

"Often, during the afternoon, as I am responsible for the euro millions society of my team, when I see the people that are on the project I ask them for the money, because if they don't pay, I must follow them (...) the Euro-million is a common motivation that is on my shoulders..."

Particularly those interruptions bring intrinsic motivation for the employee once time they do not characterize extrinsic factors of motivation such as salary, promotions or working conditions, being more influential as motivational agent than extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Furthermore employee's choice, self recognition and opportunities for self-direction enhance intrinsic motivation because they allow people a higher feeling of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Caring of Personal Life enabling Psychological and Physical Stability

The need to be informed about what is going on in the world, personal relationships such as family which requires many times the resolution of timely or extended problems, or even physical needs having to be met in order to keep you alive, constitute reasons to carry out some practices at work shown in (*exhibit 2*) several times during the work day.

Starting with the importance of breaks to answer physical needs such as to eat something (i.e. to have lunch) or to go to the bathroom, if they were not carried out the worker's health would be weakened so that the work itself would suffer. Therefore they constitute the most common form of interrupting work due to the dependence of the human being in doing it:

“Sincerely the main reason is because I'm hungry. I'm a person that needs to stop because I'm hungry. I want to eat at that time and it's really a moment...”; “Well, drinking a glass of water will be just for physiological needs, is nothing more, I come by train and I eat the breakfast very early at home and normally I don't drink water...”; “I not ashamed of brushing my teeth, but I feel more comfortable if I brush at work instead of doing it in a cafe or in a restaurant where anyone could enter...”

Secondly, there are other interests and personal matters that influence the employees to engage in some practices in order to care for personal life. Exploring the Internet to check travel prices, to schedule a medical appointment, or to find some address in the yellow pages are some activities that employees reported to execute:

“Today I had to use it to search for a clinic where I need to arrange a medical appointment, yes I use it. Whenever I need to search for something, yes, I use the internet.”

Reading online news, or journals, is another kind of activity performed on the web allowing the flow of information that contains the advantage of acquiring general knowledge and could in some cases bring additional help to the job:

“Reading journals?!... It's always good being informed about what's going on in the world and also for general knowledge (...) In this crisis situation for instance, we have a lot of clients that are suffering and there are specific cases within the enterprise, PT, or BCP, these are enterprises which we work with and it's recommended that we are aware of things that are happening to them.”

Similarly listening to the radio is a practice that appears on this study showing another way of being informed about what is going on and, capturing some spontaneous information useful for the employee:

“In the case of regional radio it’s interesting because as it’s from Oliveira de Azeméis we listen to some events that interest us, some restaurants that opened. Sometimes it’s one more hypothesis, one more choice.”

Employees reported the necessity of keeping in touch with the family and friends as a method of solving personal problems, and keep their social network, inherent of their personal life. Through the internet, using messenger, writing personal e-mails or through mobile or work phone they can accomplish these goals:

“These breaks are always important because, there are issues that you have to deal with day-to-day, such as calling your mother, friend, sometimes I phone to Carina, “is everything alright?” and when you are filling out papers or things like that, I phone to know if everything is alright, and to catch up.”

“I always like to have Messenger turned on because we have so little time to speak with friends for instance, we can’t be always with friends, so that I like to have it turned on, sometimes I can chat with one friend or another that I’m not used to see...”

In order to satisfy personal goals, Rafaela performs a list of needs showing some extra activities that must be accomplished such as home expenditures or purchases at the supermarket:

“Sometimes those things that we need to organize at home, I have to go to the supermarket, I have to do this errand, or I have to pay these accounts, making a purchase list (...) those things that do not have much relation with the work but need to be done.”

Interestingly an interviewee admitted paying parking meters during office hours as a form of saving money given the need of having their car in the park many hours during the work-day:

“Usually people do not insert a coin for all the hours that they have their car at the parking meter, we do not pay 8 or 9 hours of parking meter, this is when these are 8 or 9 hours and not more. Thus to avoid punishments there is the habit of putting a coin in the parking meter from time to time.”

Caring for one’s personal life where physical needs are included is the reason justifying some part of the time spent on breaks and represent some worries that accompany the employee’s life. The importance of engaging these practices remains to

manage personal matters, to keep informed about everything, (providing some help for the job), and sustain their social life. Furthermore, recognizing the importance of employees realization of basic emotional needs such as desire for affection, emotional security, and personal significance constitute representative aspects to be carefully taken into account by the organization. It allows a sustained construction of self commitment, motivation and productivity within the organization (Honeycutt, 1989).

Self-Organization

Some practices shown in (*exhibit 2*) are activities done by employees in order to self-organize⁴. It seems like an organizational process of ideas, ordering the worker's mind before or after the execution of a work-task. Giving an example, Luis admitted clearing his mind while he is smoking a cigarette, as being a favorable moment where mental organization implicitly can happen:

"I think it's a nice moment of organization, organization of the morning during that cigarette and organization of the afternoon during the afternoon cigarette(...) and it's a break really that I'm smoking a cigarette and organizing myself..."

On the other hand scribbling on a piece of paper, without any clear objective is a strategy followed by Pedro as an activity useful to organize the natural outflow of ideas:

"I scribble, what I do several times when I have a logical problem, I pick up a piece of paper and a pen and start drawing the direction of the information in a logical flow."

Periods of time are taken as well, to write items on Post-It's, checking off the activities of the posts on a piece of paper or even, just to organize their messages on Outlook constituting personal strategies of organization:

⁴Note that those practices allowing the self-organization are executed individually by employees.

“...but I stop to wiggle the paper. Sometimes I take it out and I write on it again with a different order with new things that I need to highlight... I look at it to re-organize the things and I think: now that I’m freer how can I organize this?”

“Usually I have some tasks written on Outlook and when I log on I organize all the tasks with the Outlook, not really tasks but messages that are equivalent to tasks, I put all the tasks there in order to not forget me of work. I try do not have all the work inside my head, I try to have the work inside the Outlook then the weekend comes and the work ends.”

“That hour everything is calm and so basically I catch up on all the tasks that I have to do, even those post-its, to cross out during the day. (...) Therefore basically I organize the whole day. Of course there are always things that I cannot organize because there are unpredictable things...”

The purpose is to keep their self-organization, being aware of the activities that they need to perform and to prepare the work-day. Furthermore a break to clean the desk is another activity performed as the same intuit:

“I like to have the desk cleaned, it’s a question of organization only, fundamentally picking up those post-its that I have there and move some tasks to another place.”

Thus, the importance of those activities is evident since they allow the self-organization being possible to clarify objectives and improve personal efficiency.

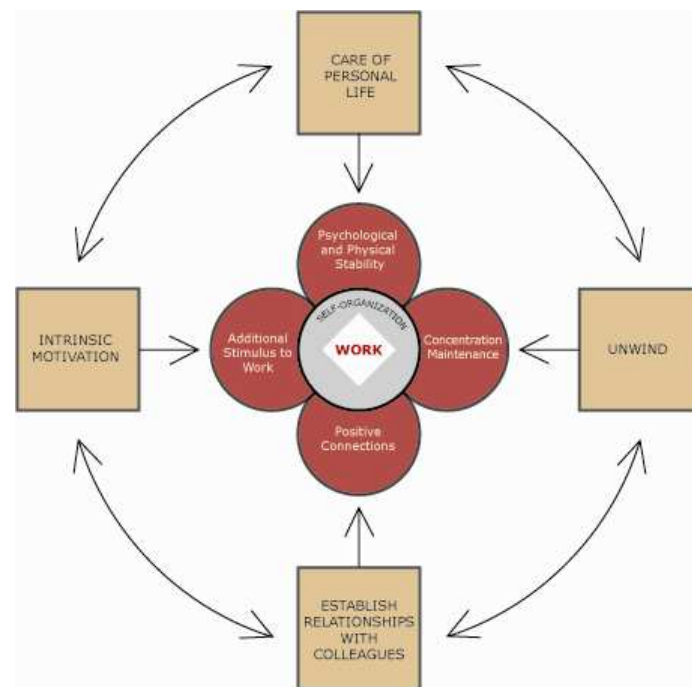
From all the reasons mentioned in this project taking breaks to organize, is one of the leading causes for to the boundaries between work and non-work activities. Some of these practices are greater complements to work. Although the information provided by the interviews argues that the practices used in order to organize are not part of the work itself and other interviewees with similar tasks did not mention the need of performing these practices. This suggests those practices are not part of the work itself. Therefore the practices used for self-organization are considered also non-work related activities, observing the non-mandatory way of doing them to get the same proposed work output.

Conclusion

The reasons leading employees to perform breaks at work and the usefulness of the typical non-work related practices that they engaged in were succinctly explained. Spending time at work in those practices is not so bad according as they bring additional benefits to the work itself. Framework about consequences of taking breaks at work (shown in next page, *figure 1*) represents in a schematic way how the practices carried out by employees constitute important inputs to the work. All together, compose the theoretical structure about the importance of what do people do at work when they are not working.

The negative impact that breaks at work might constitute, such as procrastination (i.e. resistance in starting or continuing the work) or the extended amount of time spent backing at the point of the task being performed (Jett and George, 2003) was not disregarded. However the challenge of this study was verifying, the less obvious, the benefits of interruptions at work which many organizations have seen just from the negative side. Thus, it was possible to verify that moments where employees take time to unwind or respite is the reason requiring the employee to change the context, to re-focus, leading the maintenance of employee's concentration at work. Developing relationships at work provides strengthening of colleagues' relations, giving them confidence and trust with each other, enabling the creation of positive connections at work. During breaks some practices can provide intrinsic motivation increasing the willingness to execute the work, and energizing the employee. Various basic needs require being satisfied in a timely manner such as physical needs or when personal problems occur, could on the first hand affect the physical stability and on the other hand affect the psychological stability of the employee. Self-organization can occur

Figure 1: Dynamic Framework about Consequences of Non-work related Practices:



during non-work periods at work, ordering the workers' mind and improving personal efficiency, functioning as a complementary support for the work.

As a result of the interaction effects, a dynamic model is suggested (*figure 1*), not only because the direct effect provided by the causes to perform breaks and the resulting benefits brought to the work itself, but also due to the inter-relation among the reasons to execute breaks⁵. Practices to unwind can allow employees to take care of personal life, (i.e. checking personal e-mails) while establishing relationships at work, (i.e. speaking with colleagues). Practices to establish relationships with colleagues at work can allow employees to unwind (i.e. chatting with colleagues) and can be a source of intrinsic motivation (i.e. certain conversational contents provided by colleagues). Practices enhancing intrinsic motivation can involve the development of relationships at work (i.e. toast to the success) and fostering the commitment of personal goals (i.e.

⁵Note that the following examples show some particular practices already referred, fulfilling different reasons, thus increasing the understanding of the existent relations (*Exhibit 2*).

managing the euro-million society). Practices to take care of personal life can allow employees to unwind (i.e. drinking water) and can also add motivational agents, (i.e. reading online journals). At a closer level of work, various practices allowing the individual organization can accompany directly the work itself, they are not part of it following the employee's interpretation, although due to their approach are considered near the limits between what is work and what is not work.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This research project focuses only on the interruptions freely chosen by employees, (interruptions as breaks) not covering other forms of interruptions such as intrusions, distractions or discrepancies (Jett and George, 2003).

The small group of interviewees does not allow a larger range of different work experiences as well as facing a high degree of subjectivity due to the different interpretations of the interviewees, permitting them to answer whatever they want and without assurance of their true behavior. Direct observation periods could be a method for a deeper analysis. Other variables influencing interruptions at work such as physical office space and its influence on the employee's interruptions or the level and type of freedom that organizations give to employees engaging in some non-related work practices are some topics that require future research and were not covered on the current study. Additionally some interviewee's characteristics were not considered, such as race, gender, religion, salary level, hierarchy level, number of working hours or the dimensions of the organization. It would be interesting to analyze the variations of employee's behavior given their characteristics, thereby enriching the literature of interruptions.

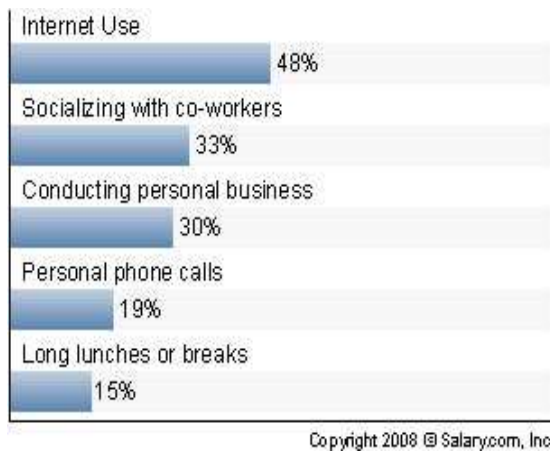
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Exhibit 1

Top 5 “time-wasting” activities are:



Top 5 work-related distracters are:

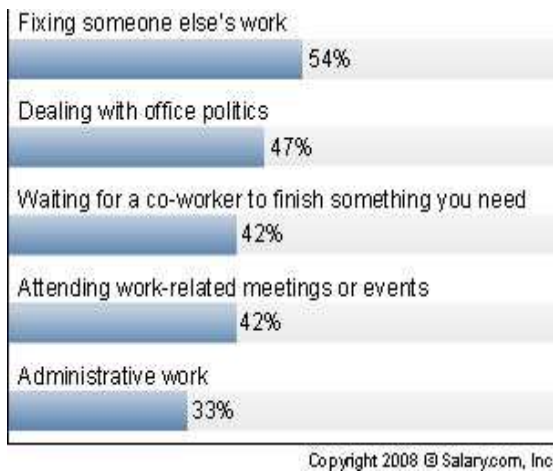


Exhibit 2

PRACTICES THAT EMPLOYEES ENGAGE IN	REASONS OF TAKING BREAKS AT WORK				
	UNWIND	ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEAGUES	INTRINSIC MOTIVATION	CARE OF PERSONAL LIFE (PERSONAL MATTERS & PHYSICAL NEEDS)	SELF-ORGANIZATION
	<p>Drinking something (coffee, water);</p> <p>Playing games:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electronic games: minesweeper; online games Table games: (snooker, table football) <p>Speaking with colleagues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laugh or joking with colleagues Chat with colleagues on internal organizational chatting programs <p>Go to the bathroom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experimenting hairdos in the bathroom Washing hands Playing on mobile phone <p>Reading newspapers;</p> <p>On the Internet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading online journals Check personal e-mail Chat with colleagues/friends on MSN <p>Listening to music;</p> <p>Smoking cigarettes;</p> <p>Get up from the desk:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go to another site to look around Deep breath in a different site 	<p>Greet colleagues;</p> <p>Speaking with colleagues about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daily live News Travels (...) <p>Accompany colleagues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breaks to smoke Drinking something (i.e. tea, coffee, water (...)) Breaks to eat <p>Chatting with colleagues on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal organizational speaking programs; (<i>Communicator</i>) Messenger <p>Playing social games;</p>	<p>The first coffee of the day;</p> <p>On the Internet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading news about football teams Checking ranking of company's agencies <p>Speak with colleagues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About some positive aspects Celebrating the success <p>Managing the Euro-Million society constituted by the team work</p>	<p>Eating or drinking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the day To have lunch <p>Go to the bathroom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physiological needs Brush teeth Wash hands <p>On the internet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Browse on the web Check personal e-mails Chatting with family and friends on MSN Reading online news <p>Using Mobile Phone to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Just check it Non-related work sms's Non-related work phone calls <p>Reading newspapers;</p> <p>Listening to the radio;</p> <p>Make a list of personal needs;</p> <p>Paying parking meter;</p>	<p>Moments for mental organization:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Smoking cigarettes Fill water bottle <p>Write or delete items in Post-it's;</p> <p>Drawing scribbles on a piece of paper;</p> <p>Organizing the inbox of e-mails;</p> <p>Cleaning the work desk;</p> <p>Check off planned activities from "to do" list;</p>